

Challenging OHA With Aloha For All

The controversial William Burgess believes agencies such as Hawaiian Home Lands and OHA lock Hawaiians in a permanent 'victim status'

By MALIA ZIMMERMAN

Attorney H. William Burgess, 72, sits beside his wife, Sandra Puanani Burgess — or “Pumpkin,” as he affectionately calls her — on a couch in the airy living room of their Hawaiian-style Tantalus home, passionately discussing the mission that both united them as a couple and divided their family.

William, a native of North Carolina who’s lived in Hawaii since 1956, and Sandra, born and raised in Hawaii in a family of Hawaiian-Chinese-Filipino ancestry, are fighting to restore harmony and equality among all races in Hawaii. Through lawsuits, political activism, public education and a coordinated but controversial campaign, “Aloha for All,” the couple is attempting to rid Hawaii of any special programs, agencies or funds for Hawaiians.

In particular, they want to disband what they term the two “motherships” of government racial discrimination: the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. They believe these agencies and other factors have brought racism to the islands and divide people, rather than creating a harmonious melting pot of all races.

“We believe in advocating for aloha for all, which means that

all citizens, whatever their ancestry, are entitled to equal protection of the law,” says Burgess. “The Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Department of Hawaiian Home Lands not only divide people according to race, they send a message to Hawaiian people that they cannot be successful or make it on their own in the world without help from government.”

Ironically, William was a member of the group that established the Office of Hawaiian Affairs

when he was elected to the state’s only constitutional convention in 1978 as one of 100 delegates charged with the task of amending the state constitution. He says OHA has been a disaster for the last 23 years.

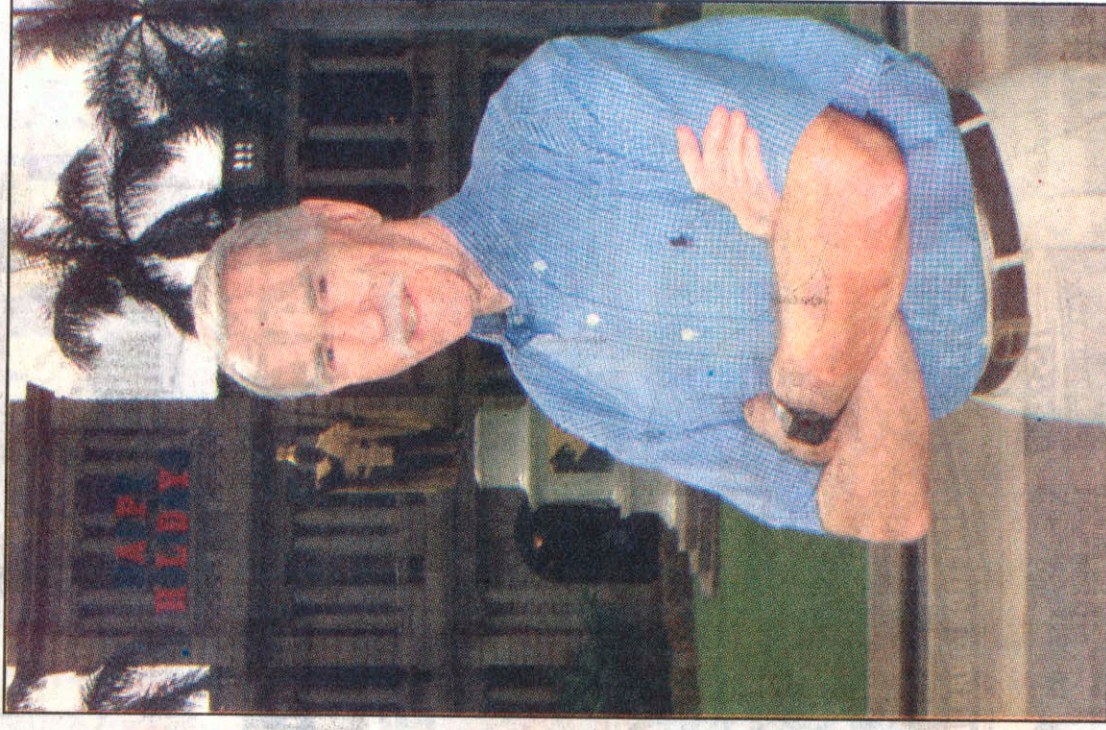
“I was concerned about the formation of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs back then, and now I am convinced OHA was the worst mistake the state ever made. But I was not on the Hawaiian affairs committee that decided to push



William got Sandra into running, and now she’s beating him



Burgess runs the controversial Aloha For All program out of his Tantalus home



Byron Lee photos

OHA, Burgess says, perpetuates Hawaiians’ status as victims

William Burgess Newsmaker

should go to the public schools rather than to OHA, Burgess says, as many of the children in public schools are of Hawaiian ancestry and these moneys benefited them as well as all children in the state school system.

“It has,” he says accusingly, “created a bureaucracy whose livelihood depends on keeping Hawaiians in a permanent victim status.”

OHA takes more than its fair share of money from the ceded lands, Burgess says, by taking not only 20 percent of the net profit but 20 percent of the gross revenues. Twenty percent of the gross is more than the entire net income from the ceded lands.

One example, he says, is Hilo Hospital, a state owned and operated facility that needs to pay its doctors, nurses and staff as well as buy medical supplies and equipment, and pay operational costs. Those expenses are not deducted from the gross revenue before OHA takes its 20 percent cut, so the hospital does not make a profit.

“This system is a vehicle for transferring vast amounts of public money to one racial group,” Burgess says.

Then from 1990 to 1993, the ceded lands issue heated up at the state Legislature and in the fed-

that change to the constitution through. John Waihee was one of the leaders of the constitutional convention, and was the dominant leader of the whole convention and the reason OHA went through.”

One of the biggest problems that came out of the formation of OHA, Burgess says, is the reduction of state income from ceded lands. Before OHA was formed, 20 percent of the net profit from the state’s ceded lands, the 1.8 million acres owned by the government of Hawaii that were turned over to the state when Hawaii was annexed in 1959, was used to fund public education. In 1980, the state Legislature decided that 20 percent of all funds derived from the public land trust would go to OHA.

Now OHA takes that 20 percent of the money for what Burgess terms “slick ads that divide people of Hawaii, legal fees, lobbyists in Washington, D.C.” The money from the ceded lands